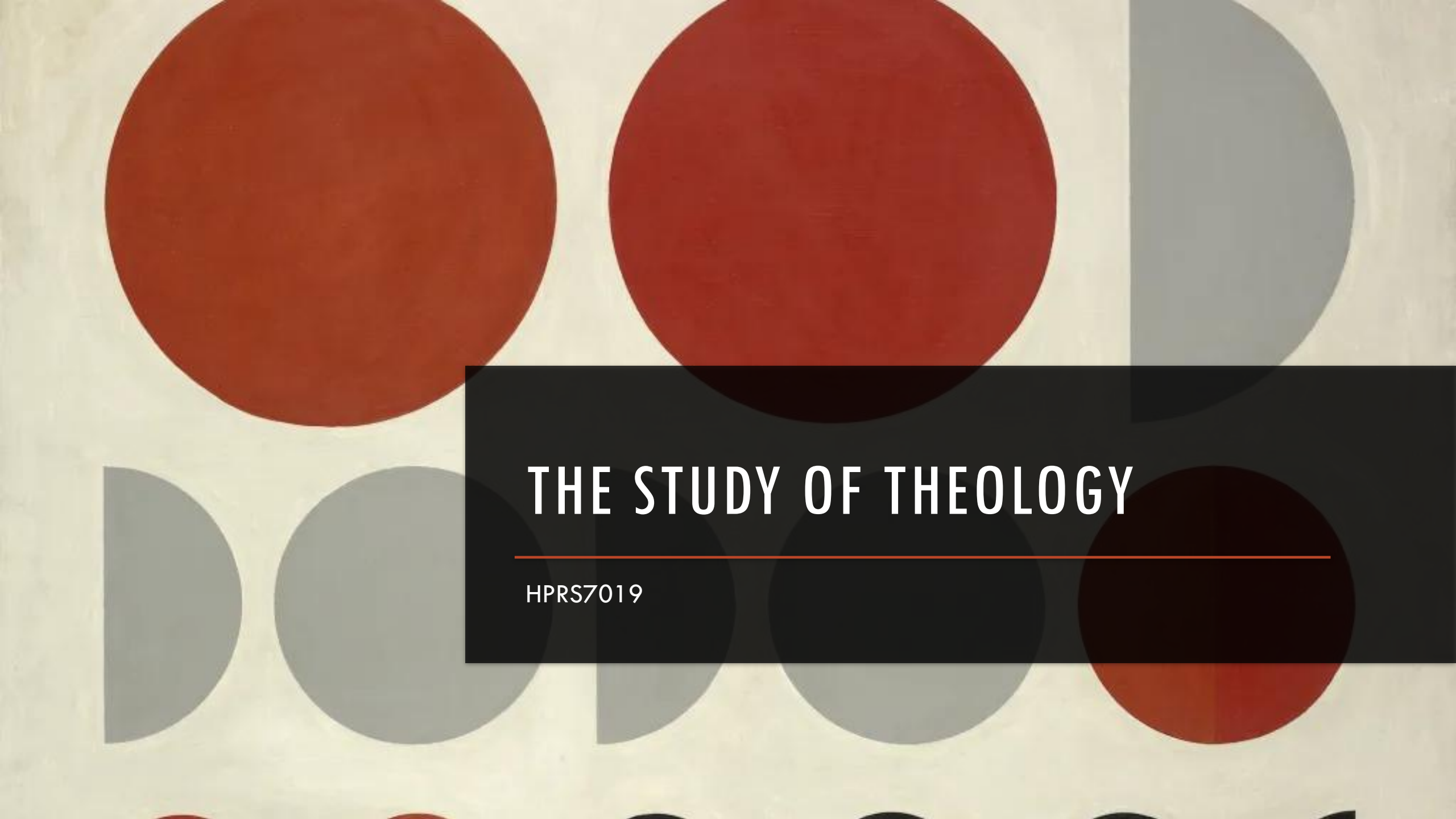
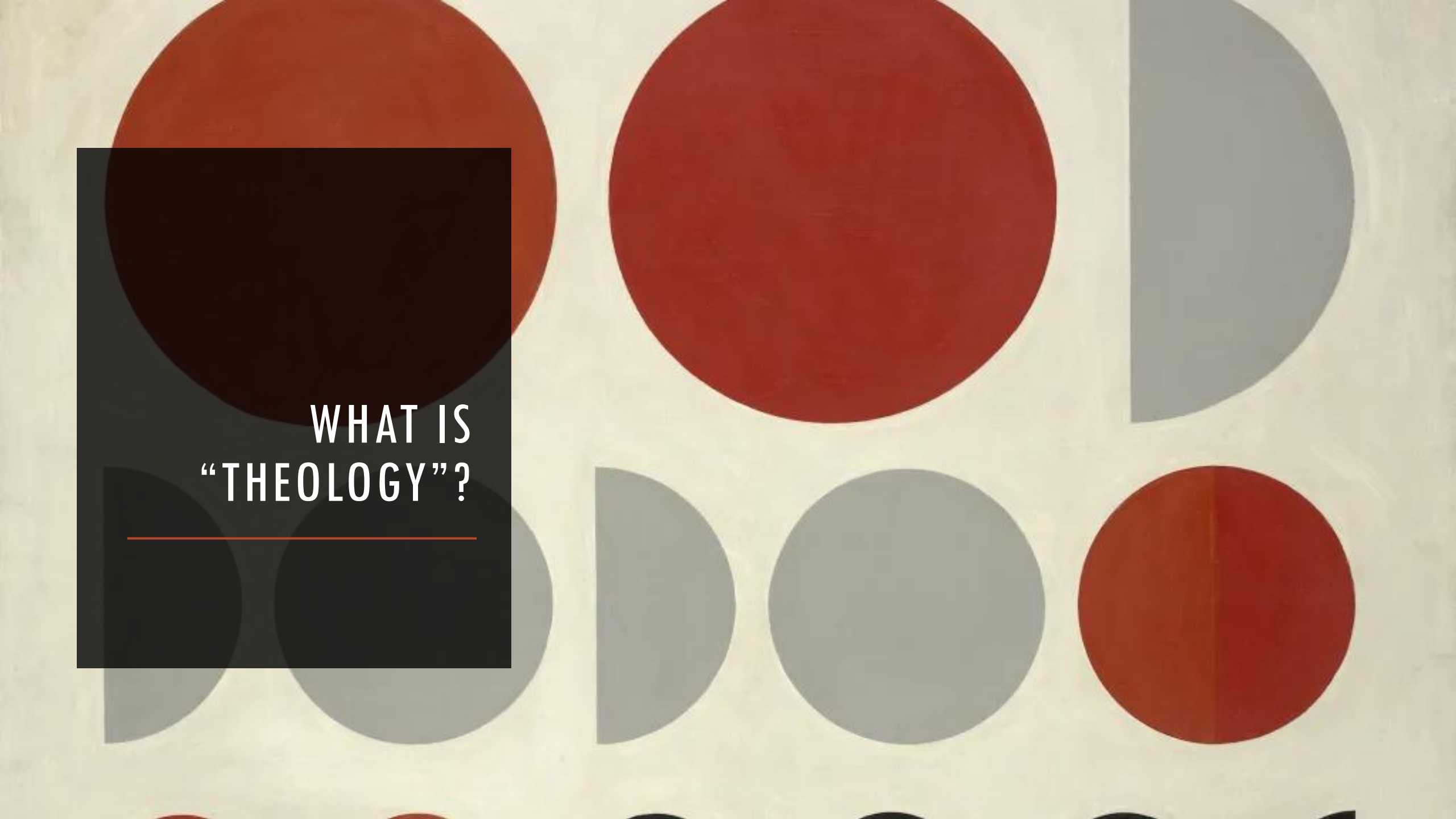


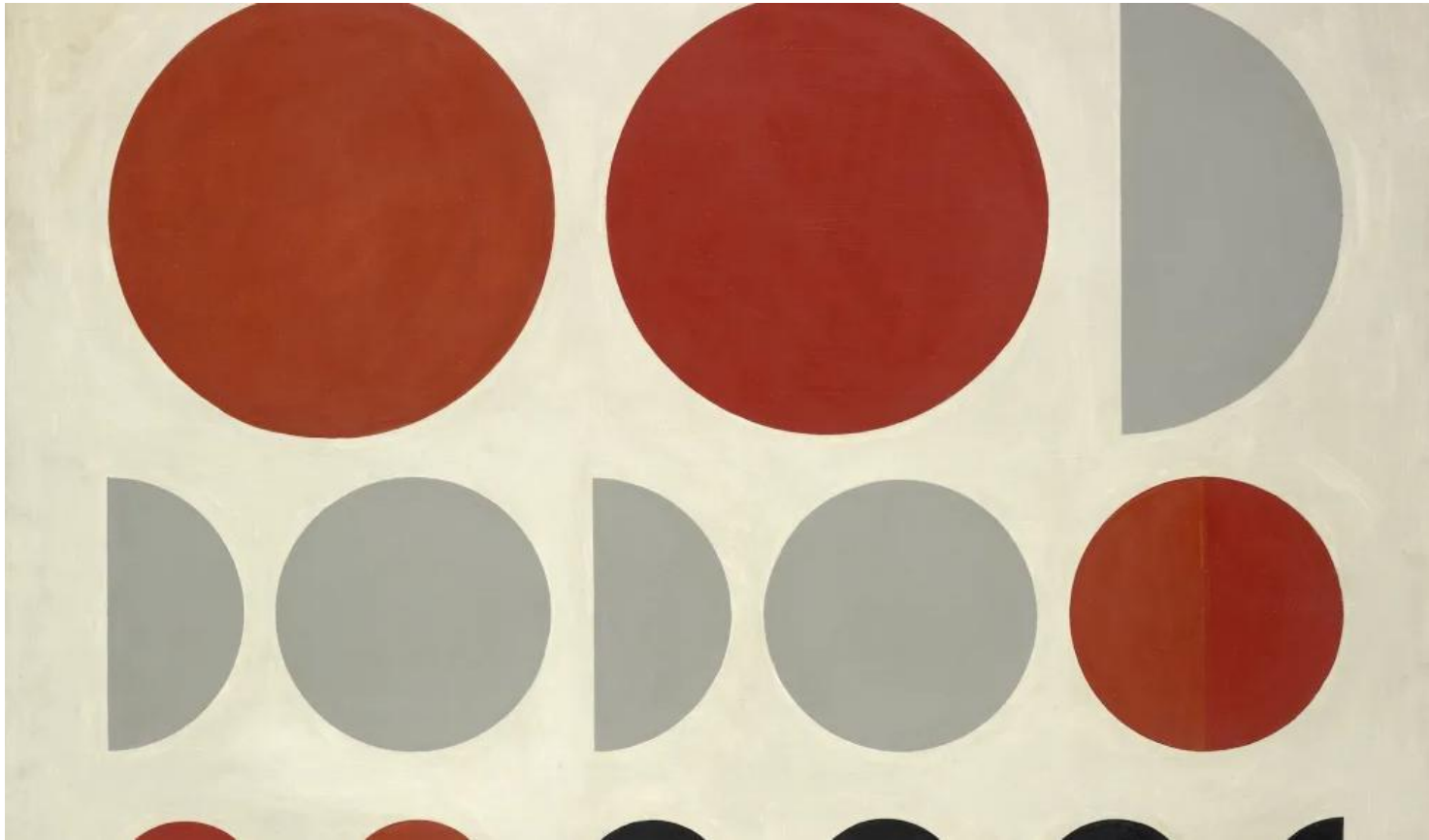


THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY

HPRS7019



WHAT IS
“THEOLOGY”?



DEFINING “THEOLOGY”

Theo (θεός) = God + Logos
(λόγος) = Word = “God
talk”

- Towey: “Thoughtful conversation about God.”
- Reason engaged with beliefs about God.

Forms of Theology:

- Explicit/Operative
- Confessional/Non-Confessional
- Informal/Academic



DEFINING “THEOLOGY”

Originally the term was explicitly religious, referring to a personal knowledge of God. But it has come to refer to a specialised domain of (largely academic) “study”.

What counts as “talk about God” depends on what God is like, how God is present in the world, and the ways that God makes himself known to us.



HANS FREI'S TYPOLOGY

HANS W. FREI

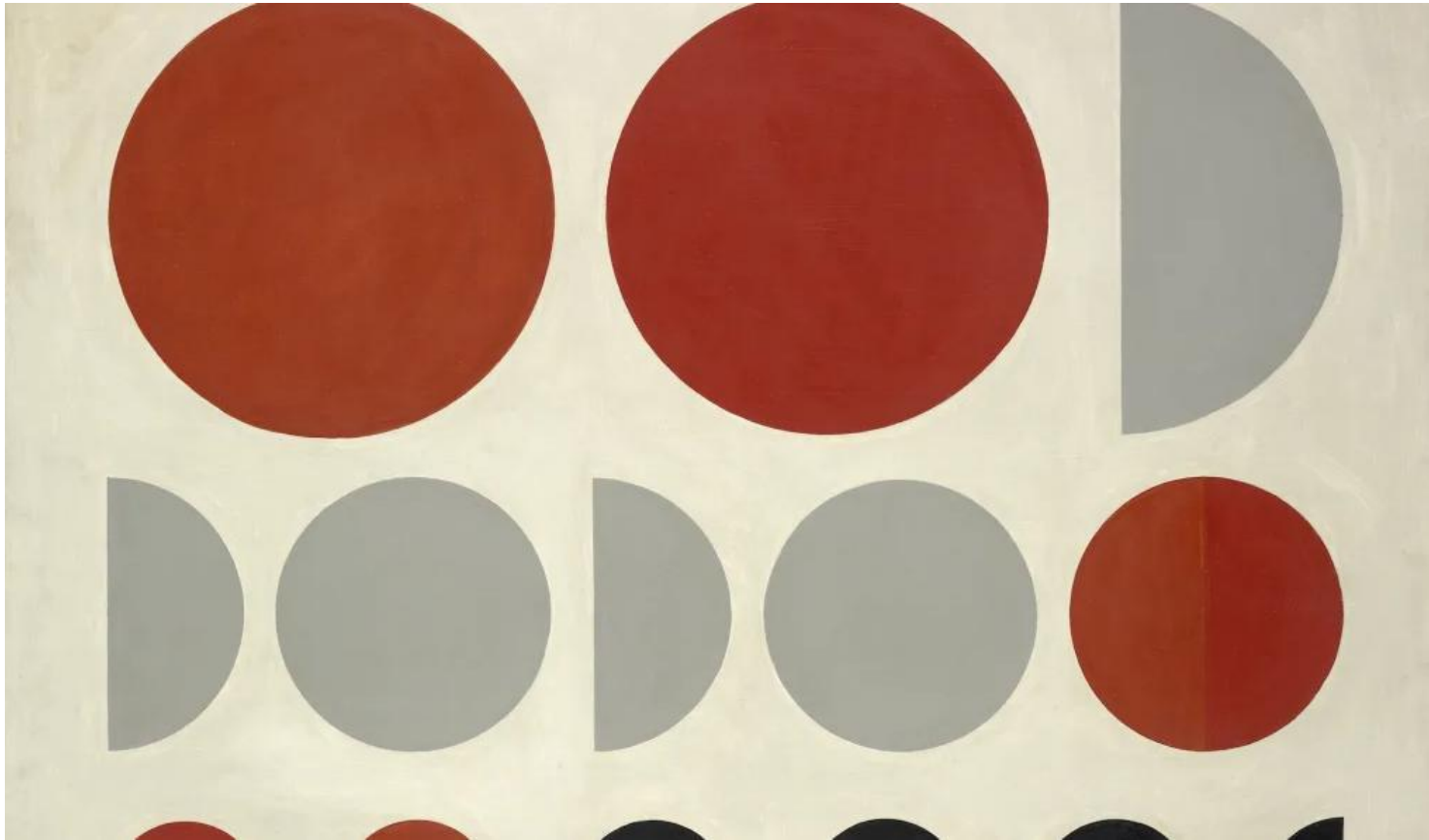
Types of
**CHRISTIAN
THEOLOGY**

HANS FREI'S 5 TYPES OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Limitations to typologies;
overlap between types

Arranged on a continuum
around the integrity of
religious “self description”.

- Type 1: those who understand religious symbols by reference to general concepts external to the religious community.
- Type 5: those that prioritise the “sectarian” meanings of those inside the religious community.



HANS FREI'S 5 TYPES OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY



Type 1: Theology as
Subsidiary of Philosophy of
Religion



Type 2: Theology as a
Hermeneutic of Human
Existence



Type 3: Theology as
Experiential-Expression



Type 4: Theology as a
Regulative Discipline



Type 5: Theology as Religious
Self-Description

TYPE 1: THEOLOGY AS SUBSIDIARY OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Ex. Gordon Kaufman: theology is philosophical reflection on a concept, “God”, and the meanings which that this concept bears within a given culture (An Essay on Theological Method).

Religion is seen as a cultural project, and so theology is a public discourse in the broadest possible sense.

It grows out of a human capacity for meaning-making, where “God” defines the ultimate horizon of meaning.

Religious communities participate in and contribute to this project by their own traditions.



TYPE 1: THEOLOGY AS SUBSIDIARY OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

The task of theology is to unearth the implicit commitments included in the “ordinary” sense of the term “God” as used in culture.

The appropriate unit of analysis here is the concept of God in “Western culture”. So, the criterion of any theology is its conformity with the range of expressions given to the concept of “God” in this context.

Religious self-description is reduced to and salient only to the extent that it offers purchase on a common object of thought.

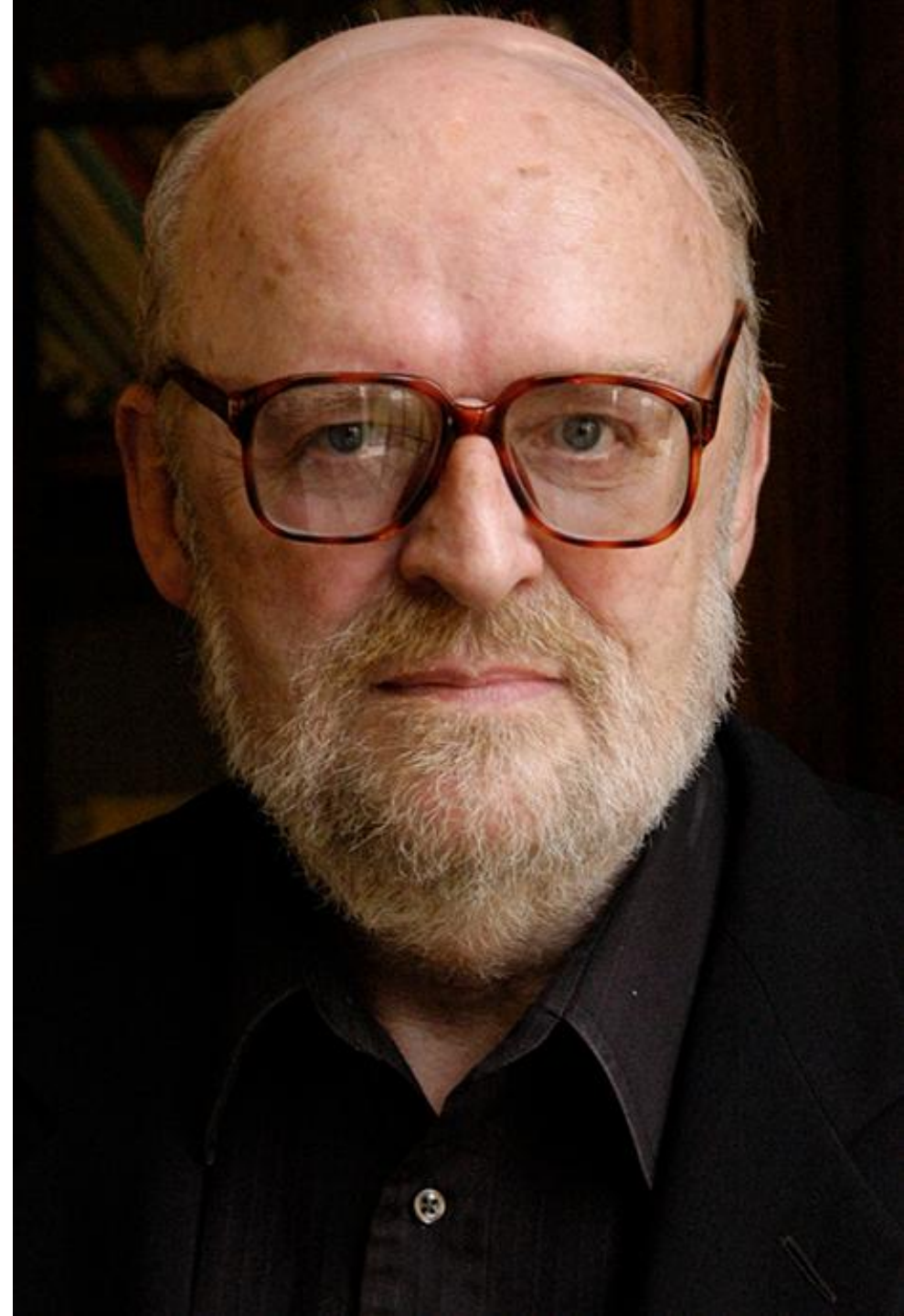


TYPE 2: THEOLOGY AS A HERMENEUTIC OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

Ex. David Tracy: theology is discourse about the meaning of our “common human experience” (Blessed Rage for Order, p. 43), particularly in its “religious dimension”, viz., human concern about the meaning and purpose of existence (p. 47).

It is a public discourse, open on all sides, that proceeds by criticism and correlation:

- Criticism: religious texts and contemporary experience are each critically examined for what they teach us about the ultimate purpose of human existence.
- Correlation: these two sources are explained in terms of one another, so that “the Christian fact” becomes a lens into the religious dimension of human experience.



TYPE 2: THEOLOGY AS A HERMENEUTIC OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

Theology becomes one instance of meaning-making, but with no specific difference between internal and external forms of description. Any formal discrepancies between these are resolved in a reduction to the phenomenology of our “common human experience”.

Frei: “finally the correlation is a matter of subsuming the specifically Christian under the general experiential religious, as one ‘regional’ aspect” (Types, p. 34)



TYPE 3: THEOLOGY AS EXPERIENTIAL-EXPRESSION

Ex. Friedrich Schleiermacher: theology is an attempt to express the nature of Christian faith.

Faith is an immediate, precognitive, “feeling” consisting in the consciousness of one’s “absolute dependence” upon God (The Christian Faith, § 4).

Doctrine is not itself the content of faith, but simply an attempt of faith to render itself intelligible by means of mental representations.

Theology is thus a second-order discourse, which is fundamentally about human states of consciousness.



TYPE 3: THEOLOGY AS EXPERIENTIAL-EXPRESSION

This discourse may take place outside of the church, but it is an essential discourse of the church, particularly its leadership, as it provides guidance to a community of faith.

This discourse may make use of philosophical or scientific disciplines to articulate itself. But, unlike with Tracy, Christian experience remains a particular phenomenon, distinct from and irreducible to a general kind of human experience.

Accordingly, Theology has its own object and domain.



TYPE 4: THEOLOGY AS A REGULATIVE DISCIPLINE

Ex. Karl Barth: theology is reflection on the “agreement of Church proclamation . . . with the revelation attested in Holy Scripture” (Church Dogmatics I.1, p. 248).

God’s Word of revelation as it addresses us in Scripture is grace and therefore free. Revelation has the character of an ‘event’, so that the Church cannot presume that it already possesses God’s Word, but must always receive it anew from God’s grace.

Church proclamation “follows after” the Word by faith, bearing witness to this Word



TYPE 4: THEOLOGY AS A REGULATIVE DISCIPLINE

Theology is a critical discipline, assessing the faithfulness of church to that Word. It is not normative, in that it can provide no definitive or final but it is regulative of the church's life and faith.

Theology is fundamentally an in house activity — that is, it is a distinctly ecclesial type of discourse, which can only be properly undertaken in faith.

It may make use of adjacent concepts and disciplines, but the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.



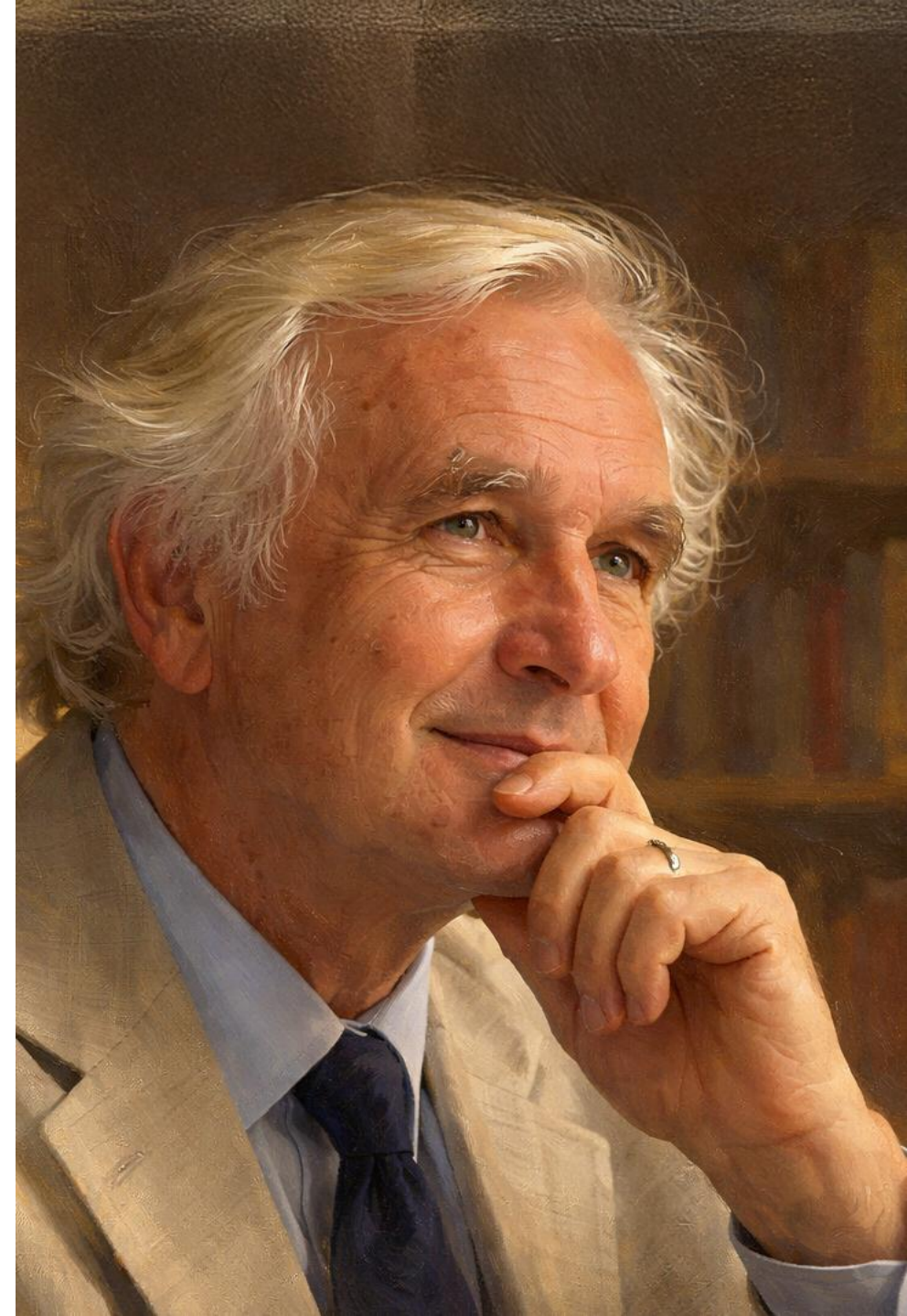
TYPE 5: THEOLOGY AS RELIGIOUS SELF-DESCRIPTION

Ex. D.Z. Phillips or, more recently, George Lindbeck:
Theology describes the “deep grammar” of Christian
religious habits (Nature of Doctrine, p. 68).

The object of theology is the common life of the
church:

- Official teachings
- Operative assumptions

Theology is a “second-order” discourse that
accompanies and directs the practices of the
religious community.



TYPE 5: THEOLOGY AS RELIGIOUS SELF-DESCRIPTION

As a discipline, it is most similar to a kind of sociology which describes the implicit “rules” internal to the practices of any society or culture.

Outsiders can participate, but “fluency” only possible for members of the community, because the referent of theological language is always the traditions and self-understanding of the community. “Correlation” is therefore entirely superfluous.

Tends toward a kind of anti realism that is not dissimilar to Type 1.



WHAT IS
THEOLOGY?

WHAT IS THEOLOGY?

“Method” is not pre-theological. Different approaches to theology as a discipline carry with them discrete theological convictions.

The focus on Internal/External Description:

- Prioritises the “uniqueness” of doctrinal teaching
- Tends to oppose “the particular” to “the general”
- Assumes a competitive or “territorial” engagement between the description of insiders & outsiders (R. Williams, *On Christian Doctrine*, p. 29).
- Minimises “exchange” or realities shared between communities in favour of community distinctives.

A THEOLOGY OF THEOLOGY

Litigating rival claims forestalls addressing the “truth question”.

And it may foreclose the possibility of a theology with sufficient comprehensiveness, where “the general” is not a rival to, but genuinely a companion of “the particular”.

Frei’s paradigm does usefully illustrate some contested aspects of theological speech in a modern context: it’s concern with the integrity of theology.

This can only be done by showing theology’s fidelity to its object.

And that requires an account of the principles of the church’s own knowledge of and witness to God: a theology of theology.



READING

Towey, A. (2018). *An introduction to Christian theology* (Second edition.). Bloomsbury T&T Clark., p. 1 – 15.

Frei, H. (1992). *Types of Christian Theology*. Yale University Press., p. 1 – 55.